

## ABSTRACT

This research grew out of my growing awareness of how my experience of early hospitalisation impacts my lived, felt and sensed therapeutic relationship, as well as recognition of an absence in the research literature. There is a growing body of literature from the fields of attachment and neuroscience (Cozolino, 2006; Fonagy *et al*, 2002) that acknowledges the impact of hospitalisation and early trauma on the development of the self in relation. Moreover, there is much attention given to the significance of the dialogic therapeutic encounter within Gestalt (Jacobs and Hycner, 2009) psychotherapy. Yet, clients' experiences of the dialogic encounter when they have experience of early hospitalisation are missing. This research therefore opens up an embodied dialogic space to explore clients' experiences of the lived, felt and sensed therapeutic relationship when they have experienced hospitalisation as babies (prior to the age of 12 months). This research uses a creative narrative inquiry (unstructured interview and creative exercise) that supports the emergence of stories that often remain silenced. The five stories that are poetically (re)produced show that clients' experiences of early hospitalisation impact their lived, felt and sensed therapeutic relationship. Moreover, the stories show how the presence of their therapist impacts their emergent narrative (Holmes, 2001) of their early experience in the 'here and now' (PHG, 1951) of their therapeutic relationship. This research argues that clients' embodied experiences of early hospitalisation are disowned (Kepner, 2001a) at a variety of levels which has implications for the praxis of Gestalt psychotherapy.